

Message Text

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PAGE 01 SEOUL 00912 111004Z

17

ACTION EA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-07 L-02

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FM AMEMBASSY SEOUL

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SEOUL 0912

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, PGOV, KS

SUBJECT: REFERENDUM

REF: A. SEOUL 0883 B. SEOUL 0882

SUMMARY: PRE-VOTING PERIOD COMING TO A RESTRAINED CLOSE, WITH BOTH OPPOSITION ELEMENTS AND GOVERNMENT GENERALLY AVOIDING DISTURBANCES OR HARSH ACTIONS. ALL KOREAN OBSERVERS EXPECT GOVERNMENT VICTORY, WITH OPPOSITION ELEMENTS CLAIMING WINNING MARGIN WILL BE OF ROKG'S OWN CHOOSING. WHILE ROKG MAY BE ARRANGING SPECIFIC PERCENTAGE, IT APPEARS THAT USUAL FORMS OF PRESSURE WOULD BE ENOUGH TO GUARANTEE MAJORITY WITHOUT BLATANT VOTE RIGGING. END SUMMARY.

1. WITH THE OPENING OF THE REFERENDUM POLLS LESS THAN 24 HOURS AWAY, THE PRE-VOTING PERIOD IS COMING TO A CLOSE ON THE RELATIVELY RESTRAINED NOTE WHICH HAS CHARACTERIZED IT THROUGHOUT. OPPOSITION ELEMENTS HAVE MADE SOME FINAL APPEALS FOR A BOYCOTT, CHIEFLY THROUGH A JOINT STATEMENT BY KIM TAE-CHUNG AND UNIFICATION PARTY CHAIRMAN YANG IL-TONG AND THROUGH NCRD ADS IN TONGA ILBO. KIM YONG-SAM, FOR HIS PART, HAS BEGUN HIS 32-HOUR HUNGER STRIKE. THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS, HOWEVER, THAT ANY OPPOSITION RALLIES OR MEETINGS ARE PLANNED FOR THIS

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 SEOUL 00912 111004Z

EVENING OR FOR THE FEBRUARY 12 VOTING DAY. THUS, THE

BRIEF FEBRUARY 6 DEMONSTRATION REPORTED IN REF. ? MAY WELL CONSTITUTE THE ONLY NOTEWORTHY PUBLIC DISTURBANCE ENGENDERED BY THE REFERENDUM PROCESS.

2. OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO MOUNT A BOYCOTT CAMPAIGN IN THE COUNTRYSIDE HAVE BEEN MINIMAL. NDP OFFICERS TOLD EMBOFFS DURING FEBRUARY 8 FIELD TRIP TO NORTH CHUNGCHONG PROVINCE THAT THEY HAD DONE VIRTUALLY NOTHING TO STIMULATE A BOYCOTT AND WERE CONVINCED THAT THE GOVERNMENT WOULD, BY ONE MEANS OR ANOTHER, ACHIEVE A LARGE FAVORABLE VOTE IN THE AREA. THEIR COMMENTS PROBABLY TYPICAL OF SITUATION OBTAINING ELSEWHERE IN RURAL AREAS.

3. GOVERNMENT HAS SO FAR SHOWN CONSIDERABLE RESTRAINT IN DEALING WITH OPPOSITION ELEMENTS. WE ARE STILL AWARE OF ONLY THREE ARRESTS FOR REFERENDUM LAW VIOLATIONS, ALL OF UNKNOWN INDIVIDUALS. WHILE ARRESTS MAY BE MADE AFTER VOTE IS IN, GOVERNMENT HAS CLEARLY TRIED TO AVOID GIVING IMPRESSION THAT VOTE IS TAKING PLACE UNDER HARSHLY REPRESSIVE CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. GOVERNMENT HAS NOT BEEN PARTICULARLY RESTRAINED, HOWEVER, IN TRYING TO ENSURE A LARGE AND FAVORABLE VOTE. TONGA ILBO AND TO CERTAIN EXTENT OTHER PAPERS, HAVE CARRIED CHARGES THAT GOVERNMENT IS DISTRIBUTING GIFTS AND MONEY TO LOCAL OFFICIALS AND VOTERS, THAT CENTRAL AND LOCAL CIVIL SERVANTS ARE BEING USED TO URGE SUPPORT FOR THE YUSHIN SYSTEM, THAT SUPPOSEDLY NEUTRAL ENLIGHTENMENT LECTURES ARE IN FACT LOADED IN FAVOR OF YUSHIN, ETC. LOCAL NDP OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO TOLD EMBOFF THAT FAVORS AND INDOCTRINATION ARE COMBINED WITH TREATS TO TURN OUT BOTH THE RURAL AND URBAN VOTE. NO ONE SEEMS PARTICULARLY EXCERCISED ABOUT THESE ACTIVITIES, HOWEVER, WHICH ARE WIDELY TAKEN AS ENDEMIC AND INEVITABLE IN KOREA.

5. AS FOR VOTE OUTCOME, FEW EDUCATED KOREANS, LEAST OF ALL OPPOSITION MEMBERS, DOUBT THAT GOVERNMENT WILL WIN REFERENDUM BY A COMFORTABLE MARGIN LARGELY OF ITS OWN CHOOSING. OPPOSITION AND PRESS CONTACTS BELIEVE

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 SEOUL 00912 111004Z

THAT THE RESULTS WILL SHOW THE GOVERNMENT WINNING WITH 70-75 PERCENT OF THE VOTES CAST. PRO-GOVT SOURCE SEES SAME MARGIN OF VICTORY. WHILE THERE IS NO POINT IN SPECULATING ON THE ACTUAL PERCENTAGE, THE EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT THE GOVERNMENT COULD WIN EVEN IN THE ABSENCE OF BLATANT FORMS OF RIGGING. IT WILL HAVE NO TROUBLE IN TURNING OUT AND INFLUENCING THE BASICALLY APATHETIC RURAL VOTE AND, GIVEN PRESSURES IT CAN ALSO BRING TO BEAR

IN CITIES, IT CAN COUNT ON A FAIR RESPONSE FROM URBAN WORKERS.

6. WITH RESPECT TO OBSERVATION OF VOTING BY FOREIGN MISSIONS (REF. A), MOFA HAS NOT ISSUED INVITATIONS TO EMBASSIES TO DO SO. AUSTRALIANS AND CANADIANS HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY AND GERMANS HAD ASKED TO VISIT POLLING PLACE, WHICH MOFA AGREED TO ARRANGE. GERMANS, HOWEVER, REPORTEDLY DO NOT NOW INTEND TO OBSERVE VOTING, FOR FEAR THEY WILL BE FILMED BY FRG CAMERA CREW PLANNING TO COVER EVENT. AUSTRALIANS ALSO HAVING SECOND THOUGHTS IN VIEW OF POSSIBILITY THAT ROKG MIGHT TRY TO GIVE IMPRESSION THAT FOREIGN DIPLOMATIC PRESENCE A SIGN OF APPROVAL OF REFERENDUM AND FAIRNESS OF VOTING PROCEDURES.
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